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The Right W O R S H I P F U L T. S.
A Member of the Honorable House of Commons.

W I T H S O M E

R E M A R Q U E S

U P O N

The intended A C T

A G A I N S T

Nonconformists,

In Order to

Moderation.

L O N D O N :

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The Right W O R S H I P F U L T. S.

A Member of the Honorable House of Commons.

S I R,



Received yours, and therein the intended Act against Non-conformists. In obedience to your Commands, I here send you my Sentiments of the Act; but I fear, I shall rather give you a testimony of my love, than of my wisdom.

I do agree that Religion is the only Orb which doth influence mens mindes; and except a Prince be powerful over their Religion (which is the bond of their Affection) he will have but a kinde of weak Dominion over their persons.

But we shall observe in the Epoches and account of times, nothing is more dangerous than severe Laws in point of Religion; for it begets a contempt in them of the Government, often occasions trouble, and many times makes

the people forsake their own Country : by this means the Princes strength is weakned both in Power and Revenue. And whether the Penalties and Forfeitures in your intended Act be not over-rigorous, I pray consider.

We know that the *Albigenses*, who were Non-conformists to the Church of *Rome*, and refused to come to Church, the Council of *Tholouse* imposed but twelve pence a Sunday and Holy-day for their contempt ; and in imitation of that, Queen *Elizabeth* of Famous Memory in the first year of her Reign imposed onely twelve pence upon the Papists (which filled all our Churches :) but in the 23 year of her Reign, when the penalty was made twenty pounds a month, and after that in the 35 year of her Reign Abjuration and Felony, there were rarely any proceedings upon those Acts : therefore I think, that good instructions, and small penalties duly levied, will effect the best reformation.

All wise men do condemn *Ferdinand* the Catholick, who expelled out of his Kingdom 124000 Families of Jews, and *Philip* the Third of *Spain* 110000 Families of Moors, because they did not conform to the Church of *Rome*, (which was a lopping off a main limb from the body Politick) for that Prince's Dominions have ever since been so deprived of people, that in *Aragon* and several other of his Kingdoms, those who will come and inhabit there, might have great quantities of Land *gratis*.

It was always my judgement, that private persons ought to give submission to publick Establishments ; and that there is no end of yielding to scruples : one scruple indulged begetteth another so long, till there is no Law left, but what pleaseth their phantasie.

But Sir, let me tell you, the inundation of the late Troubles here, like the over-flowing of *Nilus*, hath left the seeds of many monstrous Opinions amongst us.

And

And persons which have for a long time been nuzled up in erroneous Principles, and peradventure those adopted into the Family of their Faith, cannot without much difficulty be deposed; and therefore I think it more safe to convince them by Reason and Evangelical Instructions, than by Severity to compel them. To this purpose I take it Catechising and Instructing of the people in the *Nine and thirty Articles* of the Church would be an excellent Expedient, the want whereof hath almost ruined the best Church in the world: For to deal plainly with you, I think not one of 10000 ever read the *Nine and thirty Articles*, much less understood them; and how would you have them submit to those things they never understood, and desert those which they take to be Truths, and Evangelical?

Undoubtedly it's wisdom in Princes to reduce their Subjects to Uniformity of Religion, if it may be safely effected, and to obviate all new Opinions which may grow upon them: but if by sufferance the number of Subjects professing a Religion differing from their Princes, be grown to be equal or greater than those which agree with him in Opinion, the way to reform this disorder must be by Banishment, Death, an Act of Indulgence, or Evangelical Instructions. The first and second would bring the same calamity and misfortunes upon us, as that of *Ferdinand* and *Philip* the Third upon *Spain*: neither can they be done without great prejudice to the Princes Honour and Interest, when the lives and liberties of those Subjects may be more beneficial unto him, than their deaths or banishments: therefore I think, with submission to your great judgment, till people be perfectly instructed in the *Church-catechism*, and in the *Nine and thirty Articles*, it would be great Prudence to grant them a latitude, and some In-

dulgence : for we all agree in the Doctrine and Fundamental parts, only differ in some minute Ceremonies, which are but the Out-works of Religion. By this means, in some time, we should all incorporate, and grow up into one body ; whereas by severe Laws, you will establish that Separation, which you intend to prevent. It will be the only cement of King and People, and a means not only to settle peace in his Majesties Kingdoms, but to re-inpatriate and bring back multitudes of people which have issued out of this Kingdom to its almost undoing, and likewise invite many people of other Nations to come and live amongst us. By this means the stock of people would be increased (which we now want) and the King thereby become more potent in Power and Revenue.

Howsoever, it's better for the Church to want some Truths, than to have no Peace. The Church and Commonwealth are collective bodies made up of many into one ; they are so neer allied, that the one, the Church, cannot subsist but in the other, the Commonwealth : and the same men which in respect of Allegiance make the Commonwealth, do in respect of one Faith make the Church.

That which hath begotten a tenderneſs in me towards these dissenters, is this. Sir, there are not above 9000 Benefices in this Kingdom, and there are about 30000, as I am informed, admitted into Holy Orders ; certainly a great Solœciſm in point of State : For, Sir, I pray tell me how you would have the other 21000 to subsist : they are men of Learning and Parts, and most of them have nothing to support them but their Piety and Virtues.

You know, Sir, till Covetousness crept in amongst us, there were none by the Canon of the Church to be ordained, but such as had a title to a Benefice ; if the Bishop ordain-

ordained any that had not, he was at his own charges to maintain them until they were promoted: certainly an excellent Law, and would have been a means to have prevented Itinerant Preachers, and those misfortunes in this Kingdom of which we are sadly sensible, to our great grief.

But that which adds Affliction to Calamity, those 9000 Benefices are enjoyed by 5000 Parsons at the most, some of them having four or five Benefices; and being not able to officiate in them all (as it may be a great happiness to the Parishioners they are not) they appoint ignorant, scandalous, and deposed persons (and such as will serve them for the smallest wages) to officiate for them. By this means many of the Parishioners forbear to come to Church, by reason of their ignorance; and others withdraw, by reason of their deposedness: so that in many places not one third of the people come to their Parish-church, but have their Meeting-places (where they think they may serve God with knowledge and in Purity:) and they can never want Teachers and Parsons to encourage them, there being such multitudes in Orders and unprovided for, that if they should not take this course, they must perish and live in misery, notwithstanding the eminent parts and virtues in many of them. For let me tell you, Sir, there is such a surcharge of these in this Nation, that if some timely course be not taken, they will undo the Church, as the multitude of Attorneys have the Commonwealth.

Sir, I am apt to think the best expedient to establish the people in the good opinion of the Church of *England*, and to bring back others which are gone from it, is to establish by Act of Parliament as followeth.

None to be ordained, but such as are fully qualified as to Piety and Learning.

None to be ordained, but such as have a Title to a Benefice; and if the Bishop ordain any that have not, he to maintain them, till they be promoted, at his own charge.

None to have above two Benefices.

All persons to be catechised and instructed in the 39 Articles of the Church of England.

For be assured, Sir, nothing can restore this Church, but Holiness of Life, and Exemplary Vertue.

And they are not fit to be Copies to others, which are not fair writ themselves.

But there are too many amongst us who pull down by their bad Lives, what they set up by their indifferent Doctrine.

For my part, I shall never approve of any of them, but such as like *Aarons* Golden Plate in his Miter, have *Holiness* stamped upon them.

Sir, I beg your Pardon for this Interruption to your more serious Employment: I am Sir,

Your faithful Servant

W. D. B.

FINIS.